consultation with the State Governments and North-Eestern Counicl (NEC), creation of a Central Pool of Resources for funding specific projects in the North-Eastern States and Sikkim for which necessary steps have been tkaen to propose the opening of budget head in the Central Government's budget proposals for the year 1998-99, and resturcturing NEC so that it can play more active role in the economic and social transformation of these States.

(c) The Prime Minister's Office has not issued such instructions since the meeting of the Chief Ministers of the North Eastern States and Sikkim with the Prime Minister held on 8 May, 1998.

(d) There is no proposal as such to waive off loan of Nroth-Eastern States under consideration of the Government.

Some of the North-Eastern States like Assam, Tripura, Manipur, Mizoram re presented to the Government of India in the past for writing off of the loans outstanding aginst their States. The requests were, however, not acceded to. The North-Eastern States, being the Special Category States, receive Normal Plan Assistance in the form of 90% grant and 10% loan, as against the Non-Special Category States who receive it as 70% loan and 30% grant. Thus, the repayment liability of North-eastern States is much less than that of Non-Special Category States. Repayment of loan and interest thereon from the States is taken as receipts in the Central Budget. Writing off of the loan would decrease the receipts of the Centre and will adversely affect its capabilities to give further assistance to States.

Finance Commission are the appropriate Constitutional body to take decision regarding loan waiver after taking into account all aspect of States' and Centre's finances. The Tenth Finance Commission recommended writing off of 5% of the repayment due with respect to fresh loan received during 1990—95 and outstanding upto 31.03.1995 in respect of all North-Eastern States. The North-Eastern States are getting relief accordingly. The matter relating to waiving off of loan will also be taken in to account by the Eleventh Finance Commission, to be constituted shortly, within the framework of their terms of reference.

Japanese Report on Space Tourism

252. PROF. RAM KAPSE: Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are aware of the recent Japanese Report regarding "Space Tourism".

(b) if so, what are the salient features of the report;

(c) if not, whether Government would like to call for the information/report;

(d) whether it is also a fact that the ISRO is exploring the possibility of providing support for International Space Station; and

(e) what is the present position in respect of Space Transportation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI VASUNDHRA RAJE): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir. There have been various Aerospace news bulletins and articles which appeared in Journals referring to future possibilites on Space Tourism. The thoughts emerging on Space Tourism are connected with possible visits of people to be in orbit for pleasure, exploration of conducting experiments.

(c) Does not arise.

(d) ISRO has been studying opportunities for conducting scientific and technological experiments in the International Space Station through the participating nations.

(e) There are two kinds of Space Transportation today. They are Expendable Launch Vehicles and Partially. Reusable Space Shuttle. They are essentially used for orbiting satellites and manned missions.